

Policy Brief

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Teacher Professional Learning in Ghana: Promoting standards, enhancing professionalism

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2014, a National Policy Forum initiated by the Ministry of Education to discuss quality issues within the Ghanaian education sector highlighted issues of poor teacher management, supervision and support, and teacher placement and called for urgent action. This comes at the back of concerns relating to the disparity between the professional values and skills demanded from a 21st century teacher and those available among the teaching population, especially beginning teachers- a problem that could be partially addressed by a teaching regulatory body. In other countries, the teaching profession is well regulated by independent professional institutions to ensure that teachers possess the requisite attitudes, values and skills to teach.

Despite the rhetoric of a National Teaching Council (NTC) as contained in the 2008 Education Act (Act 778), a fully-fledged council has not yet been established after 8 years. Although significant effort has been made to facilitate the implementation of the policy imperatives of the NTC, the present policy direction could potentially undermine the independence and autonomy expected of a professional regulatory body. This paper argues for a policy regime that ensures that decisions of the NTC are not capriciously and unnecessarily undermined by some kleptocratic officials, especially within the strict context of the prevailing highly-sensitive political environment in Ghana.

The paper argues further that NTC agenda if properly implemented could give Ghanaian teachers the much-needed professional skills and competitive edge especially in respect of streamlining and improving the existing disparities in the teaching qualification standards among the teacher education providers in the country, and securing equality and consistency of learning opportunity for all trainees.

The paper advises the Parliament of Ghana to amend sections of the 2008 Education Act to make the NTC a fully autonomous professional body financially and administratively along the pathway of the oldest teaching council in the World, GTC Scotland.

Introduction

Professional self-regulation is a privilege teachers should strive for, a power they should be able to have, and a responsibility they should deserve. It may be a royal route to higher professionalism, i.e. to superior identity and dignity, with the potential to become a bridge between the present and the future of the teaching professionⁱ (p.160).

Eight years since the passage of the Education Act in 2008, Ghana is still struggling with implementing the espoused reform agenda, and there is widespread concern about the quality of education delivery at all levels, especially in relation to teacher education and professionalism. In February 2014, a National Policy Forum initiated by the Ministry of Education to discuss quality issues within the Ghanaian education sector highlighted issues of poor teacher management, supervision and support, and teacher placement and called for urgent actionⁱⁱ. Much of the teacher education debate in Ghana has focused on expanding access to teacher training, resulting in government's withdrawal of the teacher trainee allowance with the view to enabling the Colleges of Education (CoEs) admit more applicants³. While policy on access can address problems of high proportions of untrained teachers in the system, a wide consensus recognizes the need to address quality challenges beyond increasing enrolment and upgrading teacher training colleges to diploma awarding institutions, as presently the caseⁱⁱⁱ. One such quality challenge is a disparity between the professional values and skills demanded from a 21st century teacher and those available among the teaching population, especially beginning teachers. A 21st century teacher is expected to demonstrate high standards of ethics and professional behaviour in support of learners and in meeting their expectations^{iv}. This may involve acting with integrity and in a way that promotes trust in the profession, treating others within the school and pupils with respect, and

³ The government has replaced allowances paid to trainees of CoEs (with tertiary student loan). Prior to this new policy, the training colleges admitted students based on allocated quota of trainee allowances, resulting in limited intake despite availability of facilities for more student teachers.

taking responsibility for their actions. Behaving ethically lies fundamentally at the core of what it means to be a professional as it distinguishes professionals from others within a society. They must be equally reflexive about their own educational assumptions, values and practice. However, such dispositions appear to be missing in the Ghanaian context^v and indeed most developing countries where many teachers are struggling to construct a truly professional identity^{vi}. Underlying this assertion is the evidence of high proportions of untrained teachers and a limited support structure for them to identify, improve and maintain standards of teaching and learning, and outcomes for learners^{vii}. Even the trained teachers have often been found acting in ways that undermine the status and reputation of the teaching profession. Reports of high levels of alcoholism, lateness and absenteeism, licentious relationship with school children, child abuse/molestation, drug abuse, pilfering and other social vices among teachers abound. This disparity can partly be addressed through a well-functioning self-regulatory body that has mandate to license, govern and regulate the teaching profession. This maiden Policy Brief examines the current international experiences of using a teaching regulatory body to promote standards and enhance professionalism. It offers recommendations for establishing a world-class teaching regulatory body in Ghana, capable of propping up cutting-edge teachers with the requisite knowledge, attributes and skills for a lifetime of teaching career.

The International Scene

Several countries have embraced the notion of regulating the teaching profession and, in so doing, ensuring that teachers have the requisite attitudes, values and skills to teach. Scotland and Canada, two countries with high profile teaching regulatory bodies, offer valuable policy lessons in teacher professional education in this context. The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland, 1965) and the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT, 1996) are noted as high profile, and have been the most influential in the establishment

of other similar bodies in several countries including Australia⁴ (Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards [BOSTES, 2014]), New Zealand (New Zealand Teachers Council [NZTC, 2001]), South Africa (South African Council for Educators [SACE, 2001]), Thailand (Teachers Council of Thailand [TCT, 2003]), Nigeria (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria [TRCN, 1993]) and Jamaica (Jamaica Teaching Council [JTC, 2009]), with varying power and authority^{viii}. In the United Kingdom, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland), the oldest teaching council in the world was elevated to the enviable status as the world's first independent, self-regulating body in education, following a legislation enacted by the Scottish Parliament in 2012^{ix}. In taking this step, the then First Minister for Scotland, Alex Salmond contended that this would position the GTC Scotland as a 'self-regulating, profession-led body, along the lines of the General Medical Council^x. In Northern Ireland, the Government is taking the Scottish pathway by proposing a new legislation that provides independent status for the council, extending its mandate to register Further Education (FE) lecturers; and widening its disciplinary powers^{xi}. In Wales, an attempt by the Government to increase its control over the operation of a reconfigured General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW, 2014) was however met with mixed reaction and stiff opposition. The Education (Wales) Bill of 2013 which mandated the Minister for Education to develop the first Code of Professional Conduct and Practice, required that the Council members are appointed by the Government; and made it impossible for the Council to give advice of its own volition. However, on 13 September, 2013, the GTCW presented a "Submission to Children & Young People Committee" (now Children, Young People and Education Committee) where it rejected government's attempt to

⁴ In Australia, there are also the Teachers Registration Board Tasmania (TRBT, 2000), the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT, 2001), the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia (TRBSA, 2004), the Western Australian College of Teaching (WACT, 2004), the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory (TRBNT, 2005)

undermine its independence and proposed, inter alia, the following:

- The Bill should enable Council to give advice of its own volition, to determine who it will advise and to publish its advice without prior Ministerial consent
- The Council, not the Minister, should develop the first as well as subsequent Codes of Professional Conduct and Practice.
- An independent process should be established for the appointment of Council members rather than members being appointed by Ministers.
- The basis for professional standards casework should be redefined as 'fitness to practise', rather than 'unacceptable professional misconduct, serious professional incompetence or relevant criminal offence'.
- The Council should be allowed to set its registration fee without the approval of Ministers.
- The Minister should not be involved in the approval of the pay scheme for the Council's employees. The Council, not the Minister, should be responsible for the appointment of its Chief Officer. These are internal matters for an independent, self-financing organisation.

During the stages of the Bill's passage through the National Assembly for Wales, some amendments were approved to incorporate these proposals. In England, the General Teaching Council (GTCE, 2000) was axed in 2012 for reasons that have some semblance with the current administrative and financial arrangement of Ghana's NTC agenda, as explained later.

The Ghana Case: What is happening?

In Ghana, the Education Act (Act 778) passed by the country's Parliament in 2008 calls for an establishment of a similar self-regulatory body for teaching, to be known as the National Teaching Council (NTC), with responsibility for setting professional standards, registering and licensing teachers^{xii}. This follows many years of concerns about the high number of unqualified teachers working in Ghanaian schools, and the need to ensure an effective and well-trained teaching profession. At present, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ghana Education Service (GES) together with their international partners have developed policy documents in operationalizing this aspect of the Act. In particular, the operational framework for National Teaching Council (NTC) has been developed as part of the Ghana Education Decentralization Project (GEDP) with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)^{xiii}. The NTC is expected to have a

by an Executive Secretary who doubles as the Registrar. It would appear that, this arrangement including the language of other policy documents relating to the implementation of the NTC could potentially undermine its efficiency, fairness and robustness due to the reasons highlighted in the next section. For instance, the NTC in collaboration with the GES has developed a *Handbook for Teachers on Performance Management-Professional Requirements Manual*. The handbook seeks to highlight the key benchmarks for appraising the performance of teachers by head teachers or heads of departments^{xiv}. Although, it attempts to provide some standards of practice for the teaching profession, no indication is given on how the supposed standards were derived. The question then is whose standards are they? The Ministry of Education, through the National Teaching Council is presently piloting the scheme for the registration and licensing of teachers in Shai Osudoku, Upper Manya Krobo,



THE PROBLEMS

- The Judicial powers of the National Teaching Council (NTC) are subject to approval/disapproval of the Education Minister
- Policies of the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service undermine the autonomy and independence of the NTC
- Poor framing of policies
- Role of the NTC in defining the professional standards for school leadership and institutions unclear
- Lack of clarity on the funding of NTC

THE SOLUTIONS

- Amend sections 13 (5) and (6) of the 2008 Education Act to make the NTC a fully autonomous professional body with the power to maintain and enhance teaching standards
- NTC should set standards for leadership
- Clarity on the set of attributes and skills required from teachers teaching at the initial teacher education institution
- NTC must be granted financial independence without any subvention from government

governing council, which should submit performance reports to the Minister for Education. The secretariat of the NTC is headed

Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam, Kassena-Nankana East and Savelugu-Nanton districts^{xv}.

It is argued that, the NTC agenda if properly implemented could give Ghanaian teachers the much-needed professional skills and competitive edge. Three key benefits of such a body can be identified. First, it would provide high quality teaching and learning experiences, ensuring learners achieve their optimum best. Second, it would provide teachers with a clear independent, representative and authoritative voice for the profession on teaching issues, which could transform the professional status and enhance public confidence in the teaching profession. Third, a greater emphasis on a regulatory body's qualification standards would streamline and improve the existing disparities in the teaching qualification standards among the teacher education providers in the country, securing equality and consistency of learning opportunity for all trainees.

THE POLICY CONTEXT & IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Metaphorically speaking, a profession has its Body (expertise), its Soul (values) and its Home (autonomy), together making its Honour (prestige). The teaching profession possesses a great Soul and a growing Body, but does not have its own Home, in most countries being regulated directly by State^{xvi}(p.120).

Critical to the success of the NTC is the need to assert and secure its independence, not only in setting the standards for the teaching profession, but also assuring both the profession and the general public that such standard are being upheld. This objective can best be achieved when the NTC is granted full autonomous status, due to the highly sensitive political atmosphere in Ghana. However, per sections 13 (5) and (6) of the 2008 Education Act, the judicial powers of the NTC are subject to approval/disapproval of the Minister which could potentially undermine the capacity of the Council to act independently and to insulate itself from any political interference in the discharge of its functions. As the Act puts it:

(5) A person aggrieved by a refusal under subsection (4) may appeal to the Minister against the decision of the Council.

(6) Where a decision of the Council is rescinded, the Minister shall direct the Council to register as a teacher, the person affected.

Instructively, sector Ministers have no power to vary judicial decisions of the other similar professional regulatory bodies in Ghana including the General Legal Council (Act 32, 1960) and the Health Professional Regulatory Bodies (e.g. Nursing and Midwifery Council [Act 857, 2013]). For instance, a person dissatisfied about the adjudication of the Appeals Board of the Nursing and Midwifery Council concerning revocation of their license can only seek redress at the High Courts, and not from the Minister for Health. In the case of the NTC, however, that person can appeal to the Minister for Education as mentioned in subsection 5 above and the Minister can quash the NTC's decision. It is imperative to note that, there is a great deal of unanimity over the concept of teaching regulatory bodies becoming fully independent rather than an agency of the government^{xvii}. For instance, in Scotland there appears to be a clear separation of roles between the government, represented by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, and the highly reputed GTC Scotland, with the latter acting purely as a regulator^{xviii}. Indeed, the statutory function of the GTC Scotland to determine the *fitness to teach* of those applying to be registered as well as those already registered remains almost sacrosanct. Unlike the Ghanaian context where the sector Minister can intervene, only a Court of Session (Scotland's supreme civil court) can take such action in case the GTC Scotland revokes a teacher's license.

Presently, some of the policies of MoE and the GES in this context also appear to undermine the autonomy and independence of the NTC. Indeed, the Ministry of Education considers the NTC as one of its Agencies^{xix}, for which reason a draft Teachers Standards is presently awaiting Ministerial approval. The fact that the supposed draft Teachers Standards is

at the bosom of cabinet for approval is disappointing and defies contemporary philosophy underpinning professional regulatory bodies: *Teaching Councils are independent of government direction*^{xx}. The NTC policy context is also influenced strongly by the *Pre-Tertiary Teacher Professional Development and Management in Ghana (PTPDM) framework* published by the Ministry of Education in 2012, seeking to direct and control the NTC on how to carry out its mandate^{xxi}. It specifies the framework for employment of teachers, in-service education and training (INSET), and ethical standards for teachers and teaching, expecting the NTC to implement the foregoing with fidelity. Although, the NTC examined this document which was in a partially completed form, reviewed and accepted it as its document, no significant changes appears to have been made to the original document given the power imbalance between the Ministry of Education and its agencies.

However, in accordance with section 9 of the Education Act 2008, it is for the NTC to determine what constitutes a recognised teaching qualification for individuals in Ghana seeking registration with them as a school teacher. As part of this process, and subject to broad stakeholder consultations, the NTC could set minimum entry requirements for the teacher education programmes in Ghana that lead to a recognised teaching qualification. As long as applicants meet these requirements, such education providers can then decide whether to accept or reject an applicant in line with their general admissions policy. It is therefore questionable for the MoE/GES to attempt to provide policy directions for the NTC from the onset. For any self-regulatory body to function efficiently, it needs to clearly insulate itself from the employers of the professional group it seeks to regulate. In this case, the NTC must not be subject to the control, and direction of MoE/GES which employs over 70 per cent⁵ of teachers in Ghana.

⁵ In the 2014-2015 academic year, the total number of teachers from kindergarten to senior high school was 295,673 out of which 209,626 (71%) were from the public school and 86,047 from the private school. Source: MOE EMIS Data

Furthermore, the language in which sections of the policy documents is framed equally needs considerable attention. For instance, the concept of '*disciplining teachers*' as captured in the PTPDM framework mentioned earlier and Ghana Education Decentralization Project (GEDP)^{xxii} policy can be reconsidered in favour of '*investigating and determining their fitness to teach*'. Whilst the former concept appears narrow and carries negative connotations in terms of only offences, the latter takes account of various situations that might make teachers unfit to teach, without violating any code of professionalism and practice. A simple case is a registered teacher who has been diagnosed with a long-term serious medical condition for which reason the NTC would need to assess whether they have the mental agility to teach. A confirmation of such health problem through a certified medical report could result in the declaration that such a person is unfit to teach, and removal of their name from the register of teachers accordingly. This cannot be considered a punitive action; they did not deliberately violate any ethical standards.

Of course, granting an independent status to the NTC does not necessarily translate into improved classroom standards, or that it provides the only perspective to a robust teaching professional regulatory body. After all, the General Teaching Council of England (GTCE) launched in 2000 as the professional regulatory body for teaching in England could not succeed, despite being touted as independent of the British government. The key issue that ought to drive this policy agenda is a commitment to ensuring that decisions of the NTC are not capriciously and unnecessarily undermined by some kleptocratic officials, especially within the strict context of the prevailing highly-sensitive political environment in Ghana. An oppressive government can use its agents to intimidate and witch-hunt teachers by invoking its supervisory powers over the NTC. Consider a situation where a teacher who is a known opposition political activist has won a petition seeking to strike his name from the register of teachers; the Minister for Education can issue a diktat to rescind such a decision which could erode the

public confidence in the NTC. Beyond this, given the overly bureaucratic governance arrangements in Ghana where most policy imperatives need approval from the Ministries, making the NTC an agency of MoE could discourage creativity and innovation in the discharge of its mandate. Indeed, the NTC in its present form will act as a further layer of bureaucracy in the education sector.

What is also missing in this policy space is the role of the NTC in defining the professional standards for school leadership and management. In Ghana, head teachers are usually appointed on the basis of their teaching experience and seniority^{xxiii}, a practice which appears anachronistic and questionable. Although several years of teaching experience is necessary in appointing head teachers, school leadership and administrative expertise is more important in a modern education system. A large body of studies in Ghana has concluded that heads of basic schools, for instance, lack leadership competence due to the absence of school leadership preparation programs^{xxiv}. The NTC can fill this void by setting school leadership and management standards to increase the effectiveness of the professional preparation and development of head teachers.

Further, the present law does not specify how the NTC would be funded. It would appear that funding for the NTC is expected to come from the budgetary allocation of the MoE as its agency. This is a worrying perspective given the increasing number of educational quangos in the country most of which are being funded from the MoE's budgetary allocation. This has left a small proportion of the sector's budgetary allocation for addressing the imperatives of improved learning outcomes. England provides a good case study in this context. Two major considerations appear to have informed the scraping of the General Teaching Council of England (GTCE) - administrative and financial. First, the GTCE from its inception struggled to overcome the fact that teachers felt standards had been imposed on them and that it sought to turn aspirations for best practice into mere rules. Second and even more importantly, teachers

were paying a £36.50 annual fee (a bone of contention since its inception), of which £33 was reimbursed by the Department for Education, costing the taxpayers up to £16 million. As part of the coalition government's austerity measures, and in particular a planned programme to slash the education budget by some £670 million, the GTCE was axed in March, 2012^{xxv}. Guaranteeing financial autonomy to the NTC could ensure that no government could stifle its operations through lack of funding or late disbursement of funding which as is often the case in the country.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

It would be naïve to think that GTC Scotland can be wholly transplanted into another country. Self-regulatory systems for professional bodies should be carved to the unique socio-economic, cultural, and social conditions peculiar to every country. Nevertheless, GTC Scotland does have several attributes that contribute significantly to its success and are worth replicating. The following are policy recommendations for the government to effectively implement a self-regulatory system for teaching.

- To ensure an efficient, fair and robust NTC, Parliament of Ghana should take immediate steps to amend sections 13 (5) and (6) of the 2008 Education Act to make the NTC a fully autonomous professional body with the power to maintain and enhance teaching standards, particularly with an independent statutory function of determining fitness to teach in Ghana. Repealing sections 13 (5) and (6) of the Act would establish NTC as a self-regulatory professional body, along the lines of the General Legal Council, Nursing and Midwifery Council and Medical and Dental Council of Ghana. As a fully independent body, the NTC can set its own agenda, commission its own research and lead public discussion about the teaching profession. In the medium to long term, a separate National Teaching Council Act should be passed to

bring all foreseeable regulations of the Council under one legal framework.

- In order to shift towards the contemporary view of affording all teachers opportunities to be leaders, the NTC should set standards for leadership. These standards should be designed in a manner that ‘inspires public confidence in head teachers, raise aspirations, secure high academic standards in the nation’s schools, and empower the teaching profession^{xxvi}. From this perspective, the NTC would be contributing to building of leadership capabilities at all levels, and in those who aspire to be head teachers, through more structured professional preparation programs.
- The present policy is also silent on the set of attributes and skills required from teachers teaching at the initial teacher education institution (i.e. teacher educator). If teachers are expected to demonstrate certain professional standards of practice and professionalism, then those who train them must equally demonstrate similar attributes. The widely held view is that, one cannot give what they do not have. As a consequent, it may be useful that teacher educators, particularly those who teach pedagogy and practice, are required to register with the NTC, in order to be able to lead the vanguard effort to help trainees successfully meet the expected professional standards.
- To avoid the mistakes of the moribund GTCE, the NTC must be granted financial independence without any subvention from the government. In order words, the

NTC can be established as an organisation wholly self-funded by the registration fees that teachers pay on an annual basis, with no additional funding from the Government. Given that funding for most government agencies are always in arrears, granting a financial independence to the NTC could help free-up more resources for government in other critical sectors of the economy. This may require a legislation that sets out the financial procedures and rules for the organisation.

- The NTC must equally be consultative in defining the standards of practices and professionalism so that teachers may not feel standards are not being imposed on them.

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